

HR

WSD Personnel
Washington State
Employee
Assistance
Program

FrontLine Supervisor

Olympia 360.753.3260

A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

Seattle 206.281.6315

Spokane 509.482.3686

Toll Free 877.313.4455

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<http://www.dop.wa.gov/eap>

■ **My employee complains about a coworker who asks too many personal questions. The employee might be asked, "What did you do this weekend?" "What about Friday night?" "Who do you socialize with?" etc. It's not sexual harassment, but should I intervene?**

Your employee should be assertive and communicate that these personal questions are unwanted. If the questioning continues, other actions can be considered to make the behavior stop. The rule that "no means no" applies to many types of behavior that can be labeled as harassment if they don't stop. Most employees read "social cues" well and after one round of such questions without the anticipated responses would give up fast. This is normal social interaction, and all of us must acquire these skills so we can interact civilly with each other. However, some employees—for a variety of reasons—are less adept at knowing when they are violating these social norms and going over the line. They require a clearer message. Consider a supervisor referral to the EAP as part of your intervention strategy if the behavior continues.

■ **Our agency has experienced some severe layoffs this summer. Although my job is safe, I think it is starting to "get to me." My symptoms include a lot of guilt and some sleep difficulties. The agency handled everything well, so am I too sensitive?**

Although your agency has done a good job in managing a layoff plan, it is not unusual for surviving employees, including supervisors, to experience grief, anxiety, depression, and other symptoms as a result of witnessing others lose their jobs. Employees who are adversely affected by layoffs but retain their jobs may experience "layoff survivor syndrome" and are sometimes referred to as the "walking wounded" by transition management experts. Currently, many private companies as well as state agencies are being impacted by economic concerns, including layoffs. EAP's play critical roles in supporting employees and surviving coworkers during times like this. If your workplace is characterized by close relationships among employees and is a place where personal connections and "family culture" are exhibited, layoff survivor syndrome can be strongly felt. Seek support for these confusing but natural stress symptoms.

■ **I called 911 after my employee became very upset—shaking uncontrollably—following an event where another employee was seriously injured. It**

You did the right thing by calling 911 so that professionals could address the employee's reaction to this acute and difficult situation. Your concern was obviously for safety and whether your employee was okay to work (fit for duty) given the behavior you witnessed. From your perspective now, this situation may seem to have been "all psychological," but

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appeared their problem was all psychological. Should I have called the EAP instead?

at the time of the incident, it was a medical crisis requiring immediate intervention. Your EAP is not designed to physically take control of an employee's behavior or assess medical needs. Call your EA Professional for further discussion about this situation. You can work together to develop an appropriate post-incident plan that may include EAP assessment, referral and additional follow-up care for employees impacted by this traumatic incident.

■ **I have employees who can't write effectively. Written projects, e-mails, and other types of communication are embarrassing my department. Can the EAP assist, or is this a problem EAP's don't address?**

The criterion for a supervisor referral to the EAP is an employee with a performance problem. Typically, this person is not improving despite your attempts to correct the problem. True, referring an employee to the EAP because he or she can't write well is not an everyday occurrence, but it still fits the criterion. Not only are remedial courses available in the community, but online resources are also available. The problem of employees having deficient writing skills is not new, but with improvements in technology, the resources to address it are growing. One survey by Public Agenda found that 73% of employers report that high school graduates are deficient in writing skills. The necessity of employers to have a competitive workforce underscores the need for addressing this concern. (Source: Public Agenda for Citizens, "Where's the Backlash", Press Release, March 5, 2002)

■ **There are thousands of resources online to help employees with everything from being assertive to managing stress to dealing with sleep problems and improving relationships. What benefit is the EAP if all it takes is Googling a topic to get help?**

There are many helpful resources online, but unfortunately, it's hard to know which ones to trust. Some of them could actually be harmful or counter-productive. Even those that are well established and reputable have limitations and do not match the services and benefits of EAP assessment and referral. Helping employees includes understanding the unique nature of a personal problem, providing motivational counseling, and keeping the ball rolling with follow-up. Often, determining the nature of a problem is difficult, and the proper treatment may need to be thoroughly examined so there is a successful problem-solution match. Symptoms of a problem may seem obvious, and employees may decide a certain type of treatment will work. This type of self-assessment is often incomplete or inaccurate and does not lend itself well to Googling a solution. It may even prove to be a path to failure in treating the true problem and in returning the employee to a level of satisfactory performance.

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